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SUBJECT: JEREMIC OSCE SPEECH GENERATES LITTLE FIREWORKS

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Serbian Foreign Vuk Jeremic's February 19 OSCE address to protest Kosovo's independence was passionate but reasoned, and met with a surprisingly muted response. Of the six participating States to take the floor following his speech, only two - Russia and Azerbaijan - supported Jeremic's arguments that Kosovo's declaration of independence is illegal and constitutes a dangerous precedent. End Summary.

¶2. (U) At a special meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council on February 19, Serbian Foreign Minister Vuk Jeremic exhorted OSCE participating States to uphold the principles of the Helsinki Final Act by condemning Kosovo's "unilateral and illegal declaration of independence." How the OSCE reacts to this "flagrant violation of the core norms of international conduct," Jeremic asserted, would determine the future course of the OSCE and the values which it upholds.

¶3. (U) Jeremic repeatedly condemned what he characterized as a "might makes right" approach to resolving the Kosovo conflict. He argued that Kosovo's independence, if left unchecked, would constitute a fundamental attack on the sovereign equality of states. It would also establish a very troubling precedent on a number of levels: by legitimizing the imposition of solutions to ethnic conflicts and unilateral acts of secession; by transforming the right to self-determination into a right to independence; and by violating the commitment to the peaceful resolution of disputes. Kosovo's independence would also fuel numerous other separatist movements, including those in Spain, Cyprus, and Romania.

¶4. (U) Jeremic pledged Serbia's readiness to continue talks with the Kosovo Albanians at any time and place. While Serbia is ready to give Kosovo the broadest autonomy possible, it would "remain part of Serbia forever," the foreign minister concluded.

¶5. (SBU) The reaction to Jeremic's emotional rhetoric was relatively low key. The EU managed to maintain unity and read out a statement that repeated significant portions of the February 18th GAERC statement. None of the EU member states spoke in a national capacity, which ensured that the doubters such as Spain, Cyprus and others did not break the accord.

¶6. (SBU) Only Russia and Azerbaijan publicly repudiated Kosovo's independence and endorsed the foreign minister's conclusions. The Russian Federation, predictably, was the most forceful, condemning Kosovo's declaration of independence as the "outright flouting of international law and a gross breach of the UN Charter, UNSCR 1244, and the Helsinki Final Act," and warned of the "extremely negative consequences" Kosovo's separation could have for peace in the Balkans.

¶7. (SBU) Albania, in a somewhat unhelpful intervention stressed the historical background (dating from 1917) of the conflict, was clearly pleased about how things had turned out, and called on Serbia to look at the split with Kosovo as the "end of a bad marriage." Switzerland made a strong pitch for the continuation of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo.
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